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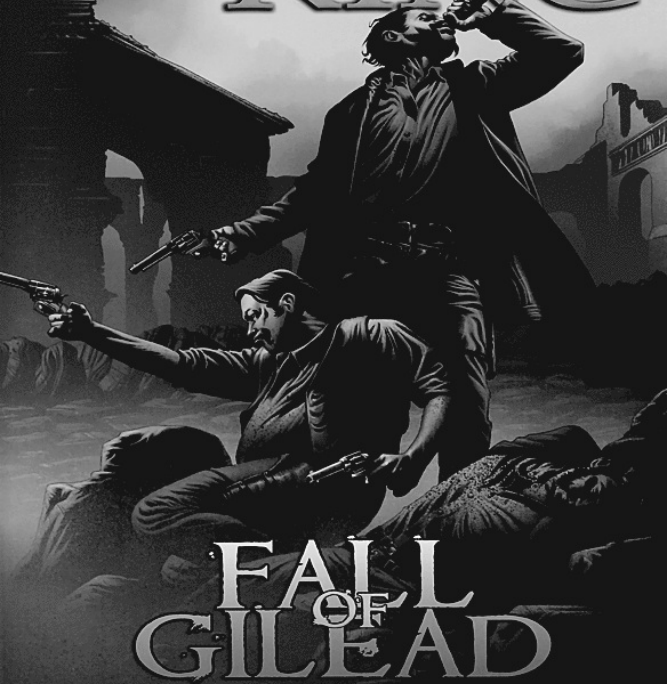
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4 of 6

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STEPHEN THE DARK KING™ TOWER



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IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

As Gilead prepared for the festive celebration of its newly-titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Steven's great enemy, John Farson, and Farson's nephew and spy, Kingson. Distrustful of his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the destructive sphere called Maerlyn's Grapefruit hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

Meanwhile, Steven Deschain has discovered his wife's betrayal and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Stephen to take the key was Gabrielle Deschain.

Roland's former teacher, Cort, discovers the treachery of Farson's nephew and slays him. Upon reading a journal Kingson left in his room, Cort was poisoned by fine particles left on the pages. With Cort's death, his niece Aileen now becomes more intent on becoming a gunslinger than ever, even to the extent of cutting her hair to appear boyish.

And while Vannay the riddle master prepares Cort's body for burial, he is shot by an unknown assailant.

*"The beginning
of the end."*

*It's an old enough turn of
phrase. We toss it around
so much that it don't got
much meaning.*

*Hard to say whether Steven
Peaschain knew that the end
was bearing down upon him
and his goodly gunslingers.*





More'n likely, even if he did know it, some part of 'im would be denying it, like as not. Men like Steven, they weren't the type to acknowledge even the possibility of defeat, much less its likelihood.

Might well be that such refusal hurt him more'n it helped.

But it's easy to sit here after the fact and second-guess great men.

I know that recent events have seemed more like a barrage of *scorpion stings* than a series of occurrences.

"My wife, *dead*. Say what
you *will* of her--and I could
say *much*--

"--she was still queen,
and a victim of forces
beyond her ken.

"And she deserved
better...

"...than to die at
the hand of her
own son.

"My son--Roland--
himself a *pawn* in a
vast game...

"...the apparent
object of which was
that damnable
Maerlyn's Grapefruit.



"And now we have
had the first *casualty*
from within our ranks.

"Robert Allgood
lies dead, sacrificing
himself to save my
own unworthy life.



"Struck down by
vomitous mutants
who now wander
with impunity in
New Canaan. And
behind it all...



"...the hand of *John
Farson*, the *Good
Man*. He moves his
black chess pieces
with certainty of his
eventual triumph.



"But we, the knights
of the white, will
confound his plans."



"I can help you leave his camp in flames while he rides before you in disgrace.

"But you will have to move tonight."





A...a *thousand* pardons, milord... my lords...

Liam, milord.

Your name, guard?

Speak your piece, Liam. Does another threat present itself?



Of a sort, milord.

It is--with respect-- regarding your *wife*.

The poor woman is dead, Liam. Whatever threat *she* presented is ended.

With respect, some people are a *greater* threat when deceased. With respect--



A little less respect and a bit more *alacrity*, Liam. Speak plainly.

Plainly, then...whatever her *sino* might have been...



...your wife was popular among the common folk for her charity and kindness.

Her violent passing was taken hard by those unaware of her misdeeds...

...which, if revealed *now*, would be dismissed as speaking ill of the dead.



"Worse, there are...*agitators*... claiming that the hand which slew her will receive merely a slap on the wrist.

"Instigators, I'll warrant, who are in Farson's employ.

"I have not seen them, but my wife is *very* well connected. Naught transpires in the city at the gossip level that eludes her.

"There is talk of forming a...what's the phrase...?"



Lynch mob?

Aye, *that's* it. To find and hang your son. They claim the gunslingers are corrupt and should be overthrown for protecting him.

My God. Can my soldiers be trusted to fire on our own people?



It will ne'er come to that.

How do you guarantee *that*, Christopher?

Full disclosure. An *open* trial for Roland. One that cannot be impeached or condemned as hiding from the public view.



It will be overseen
by a civil judge...a jury
called from--

From the very public
who would see him
hanged? What if it's
too late?

What if Farson's men have
poisoned their minds so that
Roland is dead before the
first word of testimony
is uttered?



You already
know the answer
to that, milord.

Your son is
doomed...

...unless the
machinations
of Farson are
brought to
light.



Then let that
light be from
tomorrow's
dawn.

We attack
this evening,
gentlemen. Tonight,
this ends.
Tonight...

...we save
Roland.



Roland?

Hmm?



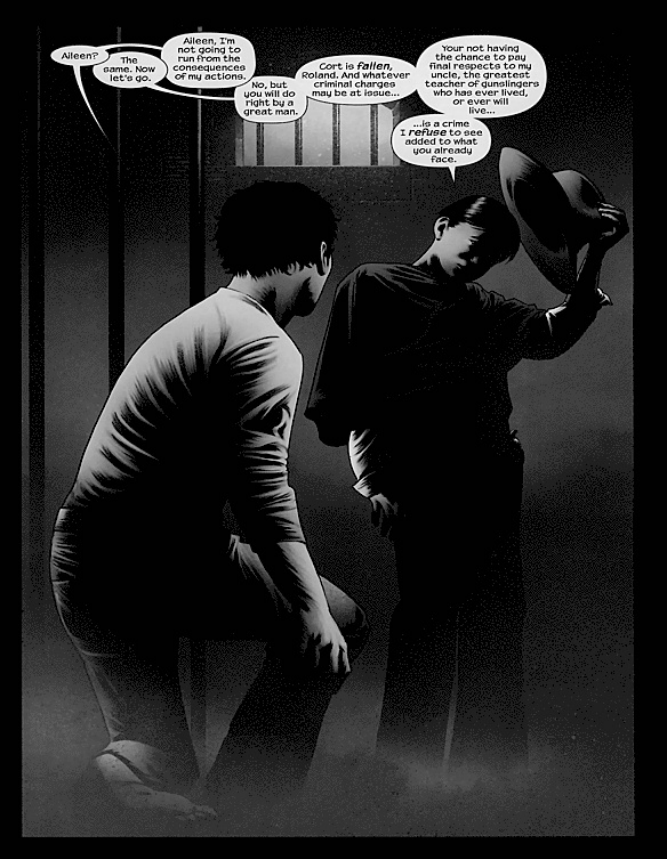
Roland.
Get off your
ass and come
on.



What are
you--?

What sort
of *trick*
is...?

"Trick?" Are
you so addled
that you can't
tell friend from
foe?



Aileen?

The
game. Now
let's go.

Aileen, I'm
not going to
run from the
consequences
of my actions.

No, but
you will do
right by a
great man.

Cort is *fallen*,
Roland. And whatever
criminal charges
may be at issue...

Your not having
the chance to pay
final respects to my
uncle, the greatest
teacher of gunslingers
who has ever lived,
or ever will
live...

...is a crime
I *refuse* to see
added to what
you already
face.

Unfortunately, there are more crimes slated for this evening that Aileen and Roland have no say over.

Such as the one to be committed against this man, who's dedicated his life to helping others.

Well, the inflammation's subsided somewhat. Still, I'll be wanting to keep an eye on those tonsils.





Just...let
me fetch my
equipment.

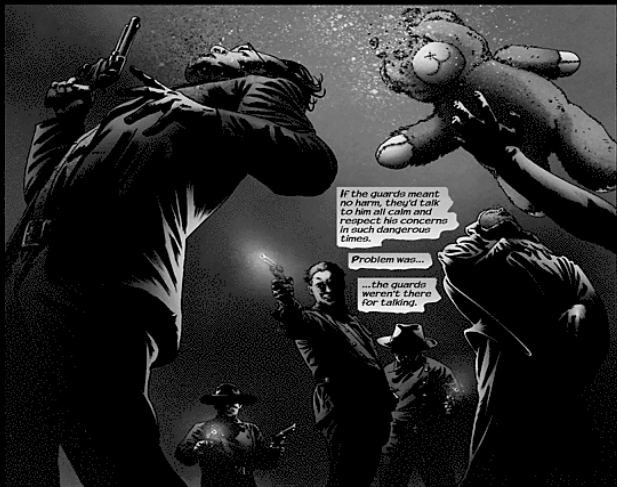
At your
leisure.

Hard to say what exactly tipped off
the Poc that something weren't right.

If I had to guess, it would
be how the guard spoke with
urgency in one breath...

...and then told him
to take his time with
the next.

I kind of doubt that
the Poc would've opened
fire. He would simply have
acted with caution.



If the guards meant
no harm, they'd talk
to him all calm and
respect his concerns
in such dangerous
times.

Problem was...

...the guards
weren't there
for talking.



Were this some epic tale of good against evil, where the good folk always win, then gunslingers would'a burst in and saved the doc and the others.

But it ain't. Proof of that is that the gunslingers were otherwise engaged.

Hold up.



Why the hesitancy, milord? He's ripe for the picking, I tell you.

And I'll take the assurance of mine own eyes over your tongue, Justus.



He creeps so stealthy that a lion hiding in the high weeds would be caught flatfooted.

But what he sees...



...catches him flatfooted instead.

Damnation!

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DARK TOWER:
THE GUNSLINGER BORN HC

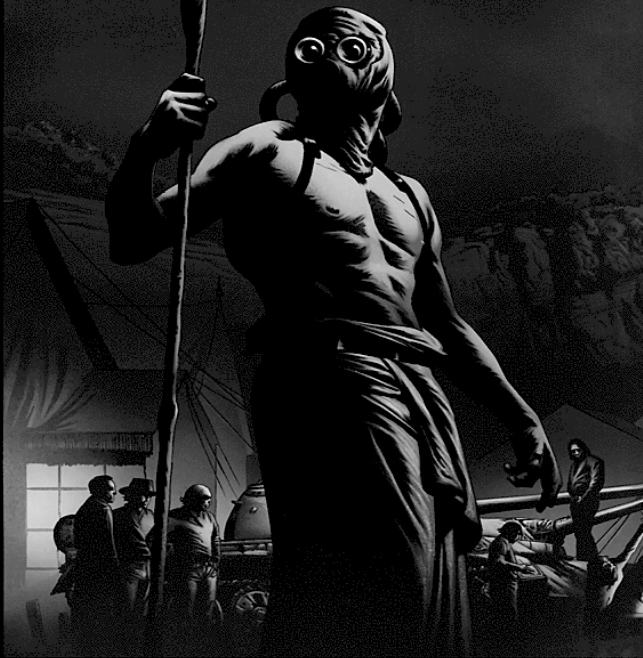


DARK TOWER:
LONG ROAD HOME HC

No skeleton crew here.
No handful of defenders
awaiting reinforcements.

Laid out below Steven
is not only a valley teeming
with Farson's men at full
strength...

...and with enough armament
culled from Old People's weapons
to take down a hundred gunslingers,
much less Steven's twenty...



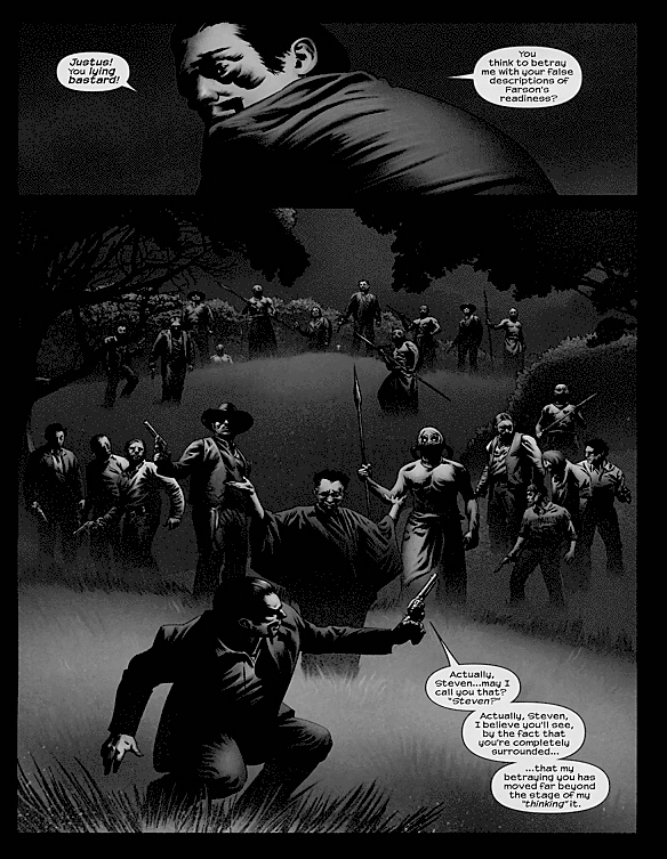
...but there's a passel
of mutants as well.

Even from his high outpost,
Steven can see how
uncomfortably the humans
mingle with the mutants...

...but there is no doubt that,
should the Good Man point
them in a direction and cry,
"Unleash havoc!"...

...they will seamlessly unite
in an orgy of destruction, all
in the name of John Farson.





*Justus!
you lying
bastard!*

You
think to betray
me with your false
descriptions of
Farson's
readiness?

Actually,
Steven...may I
call you that?
"Steven?"

Actually, Steven,
I believe you'll see,
by the fact that
you're completely
surrounded...

...that my
betraying you has
moved far beyond
the stage of my
"thinking" it.



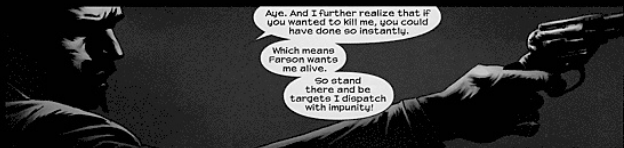
Unhhh...

Steven!
Steven, are you
mad? Do you realize
how thoroughly you're
outgunned?

Aye. And I further realize that if
you wanted to kill me, you could
have done so instantly.

Which means
Farson wants
me alive.

So stand
there and be
targets I dispatch
with impunity!



Wants you
alive, yes! But will
settle for you
dead--

BLAM

Will you
stop *shooting*
my men?!



Very
well.

Ooooooof!!!!

KRAK





Still, Farson's men, they savvy the orders well enough.



And for those of you who wonder just how much weight the orders of a spy and traitor carry...



...here's your answer.

**BLAM
BLAM
BLAM**



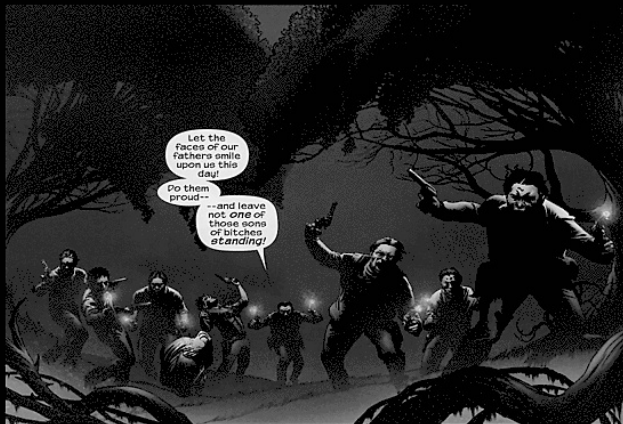


*Surrender,
gunslinger!*



Two words
that have *no
business* being
in the same
sentence!

Gunslingers!



Let the
faces of our
fathers smile
upon us this
day!

Do them
proud--

--and leave
not *one* of
those sons
of bitches
standing!





What...
what do we do,
Roland?

Do?

We have
to find the
one who did
this!



He could be
fleeing Gilead
even as we
speak!

Fleeing?
Why would they
do that? This is just
the beginning.



They?

We do not
face a lone wolf,
Aleen. We face
a ravening
pack.

And God
knows how many
more they will
destroy before
we can put
them down.



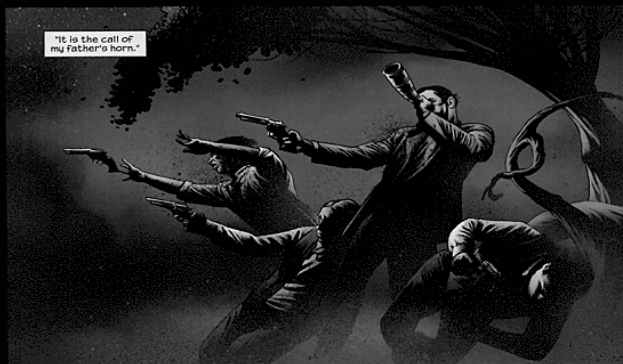
Wait...Alien...
do you hear
that?

What, Roland?
I hear nothing save
the wind...

Not the wind,
but the sound
it *carries*
upon it.

Yes...
now that
you...

Lord, it
sounds so
distant, so
mournful. What
is it--?



"It is the call of
my father's horn."



I was wrong,
Alien. This
isn't just the
beginning.

*It's the
beginning of
the end.*

TO BE
CONTINUED

THE MANY LEGENDARY ROLANDS

Every Dark Tower fan knows that Stephen King's magnum opus was inspired by Robert Browning's wonderful and enigmatic poem, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." As in Stephen King's tale, "Childe Roland" tells the story of a young man wandering a desolate wasteland in search of a Dark Tower. By the time we meet him, he has been traveling for many years. Along the way he has remembered his lost friends (one of whom is named Cuthbert) and has suffered terrible pangs of self-doubt. After

all, have not many knights before him failed in this most terrible yet significant quest? Despite the almost supernaturally oppressive landscape he must traverse and despite the strange, fey beings he meets, Childe Roland eventually triumphs. Through persistent effort and constancy of purpose, he reaches his goal:

Burningly it came on me
all at once,

This was the place! those
two hills on the right

Crouched like two bulls
locked horn in horn in fight
...

What in the midst lay but
the Tower itself?

The round squat turret,
blind as the fool's heart,

Built of brown stone,
without a counterpart

In the whole world . . .

As Childe Roland





"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."

But who was the Roland of Robert Browning's poem? Was he a historical figure or a character distilled from Browning's own rich imagination? Although Browning himself maintained that the inspiration for "Childe Rolande" came from a dream, legend is full of warriors named Roland. And it is my firm belief that it is these other Rolands that lend our Roland such potency. They are, in essence, his grandfathers, and they give him the stateliness and power of myth.

approaches the Tower he is forced to face the ghosts of his lost comrades. As he draws near, all his dead dears rise up from the hills in a sheet of flame, though whether they come to welcome him or to deter him we never learn. All that we know is that their names ring in Roland's ears, reminding him of their bravery and strength, which, like their bodies, are lost forever. With the woe of years hanging heavy on his heart, and facing the specters of his lost comrades, Childe Roland raises his horn to his lips and blows his single note. And so the poem ends with that most resonant line:

Perhaps the most famous ancestor of our beloved gunslinger was the French hero Roland, knight of Charlemagne and the protagonist of the *Chanson de Roland*, or *Song of Roland*. Although the *Chanson de Roland* wasn't recorded until the 11th or 12th century, the story itself is probably much older, since at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Roland's glorious deeds were already being recounted to soldiers preparing to do battle. Although this Roland was probably a historical figure, in legend he became larger than life. According to folklore, he stood eight feet tall and had a countenance so open and so regal that men automatically trusted him,

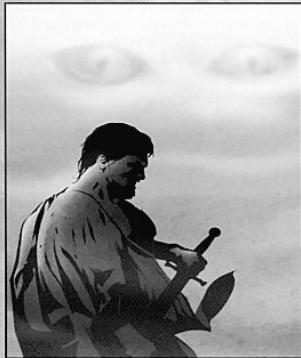
but respected him too. He had a magical sword named Durandal and an enchanted ivory horn called Olivant. Although the sword supposedly once belonged to the Trojan hero Hector, Roland won his horn from a giant named Jutmundus. Like our beloved hero, the Roland of French legend was incredibly brave, but he was also sometimes proud and rash, traits which—during the Frankish knight's final battle—cost many lives.

In *The Song of Roland*, we're told that Roland was so devoted to his uncle Charlemagne that he took on the dangerous task of protecting the king's troops against the Saracens as they crossed

the Pyrenees Mountains. However, Roland's jealous stepfather Ganelon betrayed Roland's route to his enemies. The Saracen king attacked Roland and his 20,000 men at the pass of Roncesvalles. Roland and his men fought valiantly, but they were greatly outnumbered. Though Roland could have called for aid, he continued to fight until 100,000 of the Saracens lay dead and only 50 of his own men remained alive. Although he had previously been too proud to call for help, once an additional 50,000 enemies poured into the pass, Roland raised his horn to his lips and blew, hoping to warn his king of what had happened.

Roland's horn was truly magical. So loud was its sounding that birds fell dead from the sky and the Saracen army was struck with panic. At the third warning blast the horn cracked in half, but it was already too late. By the time Charlemagne arrived Roland's men had been slaughtered. But to the end, Roland hoped to save his king. Afraid that his magical sword would fall into the hands of the enemy, the dying Roland attempted to break his weapon. But since the sword was unbreakable, he tossed it into a poisoned stream, where (according to legend) it still rests.

But this legendary





Roland is not the only influence upon our beloved main character. As many of you already know, Browning's "Childe Roland" was in part inspired by an old Scottish ballad referred to in Shakespeare's play *King Lear*. This ballad told the story of another very different Roland—one who was not a grown soldier but a young boy. (The term "childe" refers to a young, unknighthed man.) Unlike his French namesake, this Scottish hero did not have to face an army of trained soldiers but a single, magical being—the evil king of Faerie.

There are many versions of this Scottish tale of Childe Roland. In the version of the story I know best, Childe Roland, also known as Jack Rowland, is the youngest

brother of the lovely Helen, whom the King of the Fairies longs to capture. One day while Roland, his two brothers, and Helen are playing, Roland kicks a ball high over the church steeple. Helen runs after it, but though the boys wait and wait, she never returns. Frantic for their sister's safety, Roland and his two brothers search for Helen everywhere, but cannot find her. Heads hanging, they return home to their mother and tell her that Helen has been lost. But when she hears the news, their mother bursts into tears, for she knows the truth: Helen has been stolen by the King of Faeryland, and they will never see her again.

As happens in so many folktales, the two elder brothers go in search of Helen but

they too become prisoners of Faeryland. In the end it is left to the youngest boy, Roland, to save his family. Guided by magical advice (in many versions of the tale this advice is given by the magician Merlin, though in the story I know best, Merlin is replaced by a magical talking horse!) Childe Roland straps on his father's sword Excalibur and enters Faeryland. Finally, after slaying all of the magical beings who speak to him, and after going without food or drink for many days (for to eat or drink in the land of the faeries is to be trapped there forever), Childe Roland arrives at the Dark Tower. There he finds his sister Helen who cries out that he should never have come—the king of the Faeries will kill him! But Roland will not be deterred. Though the shape-shifting King of the Faeries attacks him, Roland kills the king with his father's trusty sword, freeing his sister and two brothers from their magical enchantment.

While plotting the Dark Tower comic books, the stories of these two Rolands, and of Browning's Roland, were never far from my mind. In Charlemagne's knight I saw the young, impetuous Roland who is always ready to fight for honor and glory. But in Childe Roland I saw the young hero of The Long

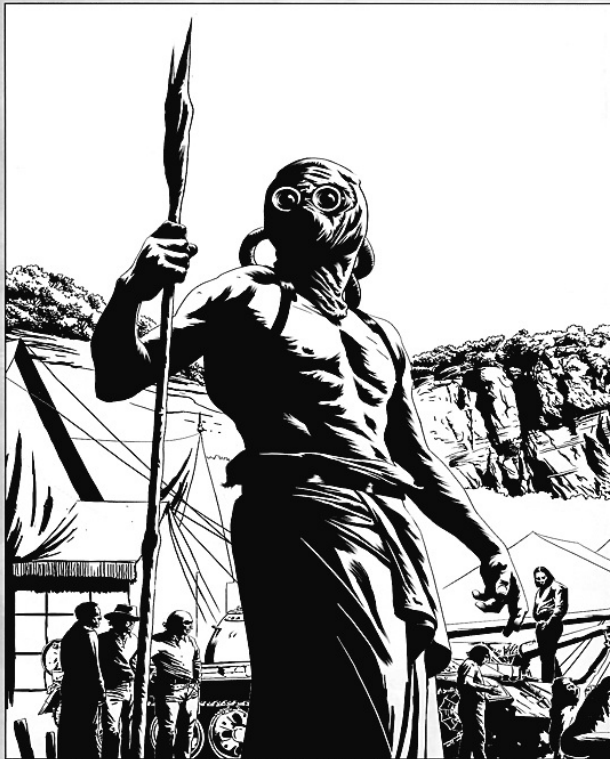
Road Home, who is spirited off to End-World (Mid-World's version of nasty Faeryland!) where he must confront the demonic, shape-shifting Crimson King who hopes to destroy the line of Eld forever. But it was in Browning's hero, who must traverse a desolate landscape bereft of life, that I saw the journey that awaited the adult Roland. For unlike the Frankish Roland who battles Saracens or the Scottish boy who triumphs over magical beings, Browning's hero travels through a ruined landscape haunted by the specters of his past—the fragmented ruins of the world he loved. In some ways, I suppose Browning's hero has the most terrible journey, because along the way he must battle his own inner demons. But his persistence and his constancy are rewarded. Though the journey has cost him his old friends and his old life, he reaches his goal. Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came. And once he arrives, he sounds his horn, in triumph. **CS**

WRITTEN BY:
ROBIN FURTH
ILLUSTRATED BY:
DENNIS CALERO

Richard Isanove's black and white artwork.
The finished versions appear earlier in this issue.











SEEN HERE IS AN UNUSED LAYOUT BY ARTIST DAVID LAFUENTE (ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN, HELLCAT). A RISING STAR AT MARVEL, LAFUENTE TAKES US BEHIND THE SCENES OF HIS JOURNEY INTO MID-WORLD.

LAFUENTE:

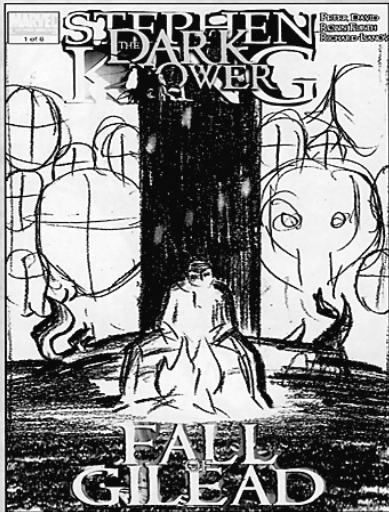
When I was gathering visual references I found that most of the variant cover artists walked a similar path, portraying iconic shots in a book-cover style layout of Roland, either young or adult, and they didn't get too much into the rest of the Dark Tower world, a world that I was fascinated by while investigating. So I tried to bring something previously unseen to the table, so to say. A peek to the background around Roland... in a very comic-book fashion. Steranko's one-image-story comes to mind.

I proposed two ideas, both featuring the supporting cast. One featuring adult Roland and characters from the novels with a layout in the tradition of the classic action comic-book covers—snapshot or even a synopsis of the interior story. The other proposal featured young Roland and... well, showing the good and evil characters and I'd stop when I ran out of paper. The thought behind it was to bring George Perez's cover concepts, those "Where's Wally?" pieces, to the Dark Tower universe.

We decided to save the novel characters for some other time and stay with the present cast. Since we all were happy with the layout composition of the adult Roland sketch, I kept it as a base. Adult Roland became young Roland and I added Aileen instead of Odetta. And crab-baddies, and robo-baddies, and bird-baddies.

Yes, I enjoyed quite a lot.

David's unused cover sketch.

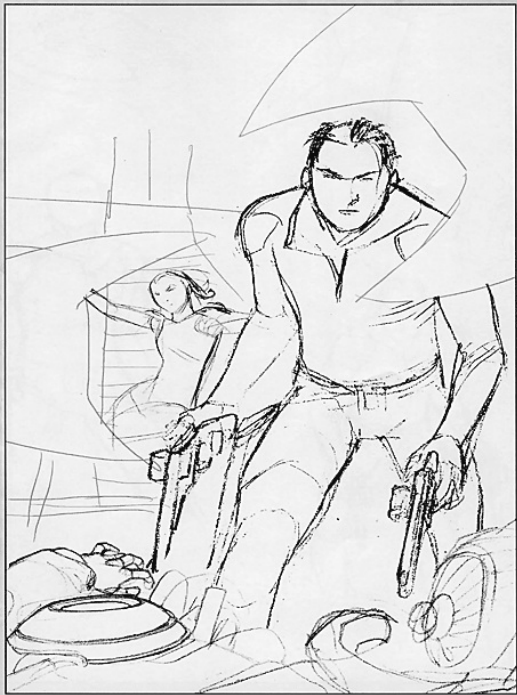


David's approved cover sketch. Odetta from the novels was featured in the original concept, but was replaced with Aileen for the final cover.



LAFUENTE:

I like to do my homework, so I spent some time reading the issues I could get a hold of, collecting all the covers and variants and the illustrations done for King's books. Once I knew a little more of the Dark Tower universe I decided to go in a different direction.



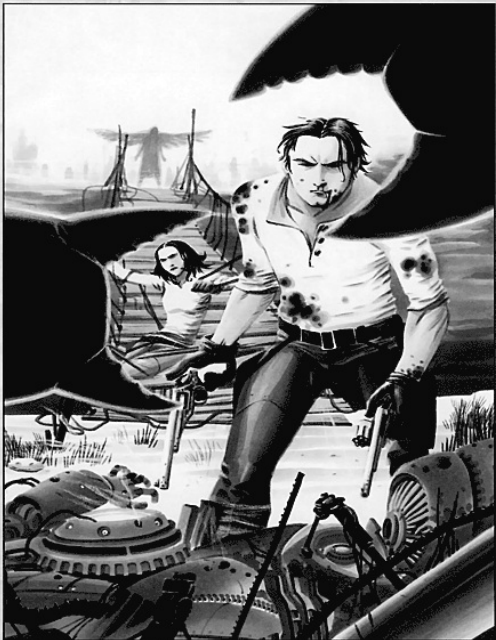


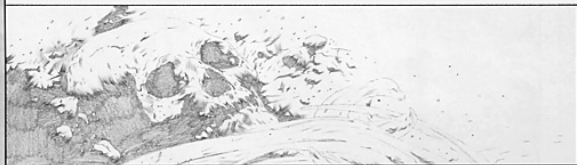
David's pencil studies

LAFUENTE:

For this cover I used Copic markers and Faber Castell Pitt pens. The former in 90% of the piece and the latter just a little at the very end of the process, to stress the expression in Roland's face, detail the belt, guns, etc. Some white pencil too.

I look for a nice, adequate, cool... idea, and then I worry about how to translate that to the paper. It leads me to push harder, to get better and experiment with the tools. Sometimes it also leads to "seven hours of drawing and it still doesn't work, arg!"





A preview of things to come...

NEXT: The Horn of Deschain is rung as the final battle begins!





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life in *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*, *The Dark Tower: The Long Road Home*, and *The Dark Tower: Treachery* comes the next chapter of this dark saga of friendship, betrayal and a cosmic quest as conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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